

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions of claims in the application.

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): An open research and development method comprising the steps of:

sending membership solicitation information to a communications network from a predetermined server;

causing an applicant for membership to report predetermined items from a network terminal operated by the applicant, by way of the communications network;

performing examination operation on the reported information in connection with membership registration;

registering the information about the applicant into a membership database on at least the condition that the applicant should have passed the examination operation;

using a human operator, which is an entity separate from the applicant, to select members for which provision of information is to be requested, by utilization of information about the members registered in the membership database; then

using the same human operator to request the selected members to offer engineering information by way of the communications network; and

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accumulating, into a knowledge database, information which has been transmitted from members registered in the membership database by way of the communications network in relation to a specific topic.

Claim 2 (Canceled)

Claim 3 (Original): The open research and development method according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

submitting given inquiries to the applicant by way of the communications network; and

determining whether to register the applicant as a member, on the basis of answers provided in response to the inquiries.

Claim 4 (Previously Presented): The open research and development method according to claim 1 or claim 3, wherein the items to be reported by the applicant include items to be used for grasping the applicant's experience in research and development.

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Claim 5 (Original): The open research and development method according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

concluding a secrecy memorandum with the applicant who has passed the examination operation, by way of the communications network; and

admitting membership registration of the applicant only if the applicant has concluded the secrecy memorandum.

Claim 6 (Original): The open research and development method according to claim 1, wherein the communications network corresponds to the Internet, and the membership solicitation information is sent from a WWW server via the Internet.

Claim 7 (Currently Amended): An open research and development system comprising:

means for sending membership solicitation information to a communications network;

means for sending items to be reported at time of application for membership to a network terminal operated by an applicant, by way of the communications network;

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means for acquiring the items which are transmitted from the network terminal by way of the communications network and for performing an examination in connection with membership registration on the basis of the received information;

means for registering the information about the applicant into a membership database at least on condition that the applicant has passed the examination;

means for a human operator, which is an entity separate from the applicant, to select members for which provision of information is to be requested, by utilization of information about the members registered in the membership database;

means for the same human operator to then request the selected members to offer engineering information by way of the communications network; and

means for accumulating, into knowledge database, information which pertains to a certain topic and which has been sent from a member registered in the membership database by way of the communications network.

Claim 8 (Canceled).

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Claim 9 (Original): The open research and development system according to claim 7, wherein the means for sending items to be reported at the time of application for membership submits given inquiries to the applicant by way of the communications network; and the means for performing an examination performs an examination on the basis of answers provided in response to the inquiries.

Claim 10 (Original): The open research and development system according to claim 7, wherein the items to be reported for application by the applicant include items to be used for grasping the applicant's experience in research and development.

Claim 11 (Original): The open research and development system according to claim 7, further comprising:

means for submitting a secrecy memorandum to the applicant who has passed the examination operation, by way of the communications network; and

means for determining whether or not the applicant has agreed on conclusion of the secrecy memorandum on the basis of the information transmitted from the network terminal in response to the submitted secrecy memorandum, wherein registration of the applicant into the membership database is admitted only if the applicant has concluded the secrecy memorandum.

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Claim 12 (Original): The open research and development system according to claim 7, wherein the communications network corresponds to the Internet, and the membership solicitation information is sent from a WWW server via the Internet.